MegaMUN 2026

World in transition

ECOSOC

committee

Addressing the global digital divide in education and the resulting inequalties

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Letter from the chairs

Dear Delegates,
It is our greatest honor and extreme pleasure to welcome you to MegaMUN's Economic and Social Council. As your chairpersons, we can promise that we will do our best to make the committee sessions as pleasant as possible to make this experience unforgettable. This document should help you to bring you closer to the discussed topic. However, we highly suggest you, to not only use this study guide as your main source of knowledge, on the contrary, this document should only give you a solid baseline to start your researches. Note that you will have to represent your country's position and opinion on the topic during the debates, not your own. This means that having an expanded expertise about your country and its history will help you to represent your delegation in the best way possible.

In brief, we encourage you to expand your knowledge and understanding on the topic as much as possible, so that the debates will flow fluently, and so that you will be the best representation of your delegation possible. We hope that this study guide will be a helpful support.
We can't wait to greet you all in Luxemburg!

Sincerely,
Chair of ECOSOC Emma Cadivel
Chair of ECOSOC Ilenia Pietrantuono

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Introduction to the committee

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the six main organs of the United Nations and is the central forum for international economic and social policy within the UN system. It brings governments, experts, and civil society together to coordinate efforts toward global development and human rights goals.

ECOSOC's core job is to discuss global economic, social and environmental issues and to make policy recommendations to UN member states and UN bodies.. It promotes higher standards of living, full employment, economic and social progress, solutions to international economic, social, health and related problems, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Created in 1945 by the UN Charter, ECOSOC is at the heart of the UN's work on development and the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. It provides the main coordination platform for the many UN specialized agencies (like WHO and FAO), funds and programmes (such as UNICEF and WFP), whose activities in turn report through ECOSOC.

ECOSOC has 54 member states elected by the UN General Assembly for overlapping three-year terms, with seats allocated by geographic region. It works through a network of subsidiary bodies, including functional commissions (for example on social development or the status of women), regional commissions, and various committees and expert bodies that focus on specific economic, social or humanitarian issues.

The council holds a substantive session each year, usually about a month long, often split between New York and Geneva, and it can also convene special or emergency meetings as needed.

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Introduction

Education is widely recognized as one of the most powerful tools to advance human dignity, social inclusion and sustainable development. The education Sustainable Development Goal 4 is one of the six SDGs that explicitly manifest the international and national commitment to leave no one behind. In 1948, education was declared as a "universal human right".

Despite decades of progress in widening access to schooling, the world is witnessing a deepening divide in digital education due to the access to digital technologies that some countries have while others don't. This divide can be stated between and within countries. Yet, as it has already been discussed several times in the Council, closing the gap in educational access is necessery if we want to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 10 which states the reduction of inequalities. This gap can originate from factors like poverty, living condition, the learners' health, ethnic and linguistic barriers. After the COVID-19 crisis these inequalities have risen even more in the least developed and developing countries. These educational inequalities impede individual achievement and life chances.

This study guide's goal is to help the ECOSOC Member States to find pathways for more equitable systems that will be reducing these gaps that exist and that are unfortunate for those children and learners suffering from them.

Historical context

The global digital divide in education refers to long-standing gaps in access to information and communication technologies, connectivity, and digital skills between and within countries, which have translated into persistent educational inequalities. These divides reflect and often deepen existing social, economic, and geographic disparities rather than existing as a separate problem.

Concerns about unequal access to educational technology started with the spread of personal computers in the 1980s and became prominent in the 1990s as the internet began to transform schools and universities. From the outset, richer countries, urban areas, and affluent or majority populations acquired computers and connectivity much earlier and more extensively than poorer countries, rural communities, and marginalized groups, creating early layers of inequality in who could benefit from digital learning resources.

By the late 20th and early 21st century, the digital divide in education expanded onto global economic hierarchies, with high-income countries in the Global North investing heavily in ICT-rich (Information and Communication Technology) schools while many low- and middle-income countries struggled with basic infrastructure. Studies of ICT in education in developing countries highlighted how limited electricity, connectivity, and equipment, coupled with low institutional capacity and governance challenges, made it difficult for digital tools to support learning on equal terms with better-resourced systems.

As access to devices and networks slowly expanded, researchers began to describe a "second-level" or "deepening" digital divide, emphasizing differences not just in having technology but in skills, meaningful use, and educational outcomes. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, even when they gained some access, were less likely to receive high-quality digital content, which limited the benefits they could get compared with their more privileged peers.

The COVID-19 pandemic made these historical divides dramatically visible when school closures forced a global shift to distance and online learning. In low-income countries, extremely high proportions of learners lacked household computers and home internet, leading to severe disruptions and learning losses concentrated among poorer, rural, and minority communities.

Over time, the educational digital divide has contributed to widening gaps in academic achievement, skills acquisition, and future opportunities between those with robust digital learning environments and those without. Because digital competences are increasingly tied to employment, civic participation, and access to information, these educational possibilities reinforce broader social inequalities.

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Current situation

The digital divide signifies unequal access to digital technologies, particularly concerning internet connectivity and divide availability. These gaps result in unequal oppurtinities for information access and digital participation.

Ensuring universal access to digital hardware, software, and high-quality broadband is essential for fostering equity and inclusion in education. Despite progress in narrowing this gap in recent years, with nearly all students across **OECD** countries having some form of internet access at home, education systems continue to encounter various barriers. These include challenges related to geographic distance, such as equipping rural areas with broadband, as well as insufficient equipment in schools and socioeconomic disparities. School capacity to enhance teaching and learning usine digital devices is greatest in socioeconomically advantaged schools than disadvantaged schools. On average, across OECD countries, in 10 out of the 11 indicators, students in advantaged schools were more likely to attend a school whose principal agreed that the school's capacity to use digital devices is sufficient.

Today, however, 2.6 billion people, which are 32% of the global population, still lack internet access, with .8 billion of them living in rural areas. 60 % of primary schools are currently not connected to internet. In general, 250 million boys are currently excluded from access to education itself. This is the case especially in low- a lower-moderate income countries.

Even in countries better technologically advanced, unequal levels of **digital literacy** exist. All depends on whether the student was born in a wealthier family or if they go to a well ressourced school.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted these digital divides. During periods of remote learning due to school closures, students reported various problems relating to their ability to learn online. While students across the OECD are generally well-equipped for learning, with around 3 in 4 students reporting to have sufficient access to digital devices and the internet when needs, many students struggled with motivating themselves to do schoolwork or with understanding school assignments.

Main Issue

The main issue in the global digital divide in education, as relevant to an ECOSOC committee, is the unequal access to internet, devices, and digital skills that excludes hundreds of millions of students, particularly in low-income countries, rural areas, and marginalized groups, from quality learning opportunities, perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities.

Limited infrastructure in rural and low-income regions, high costs of devices and data, and insufficient school readiness create barriers, showing socio-economically disadvantaged schools far less equipped for digital learning than advantaged ones. During COVID-19, these gaps left over 463 million students unable to engage in remote education, amplifying learning losses for the most vulnerable.

Beyond hardware, inequalities in digital skills and content quality mean even connected students from poorer backgrounds gain fewer benefits, leading to lower academic outcomes, reduced employability, and reinforced social stratification in the digital economy.

ECOSOC must prioritize coordinated action on connectivity, training, and financing to address this structural barrier to inclusive development.

Actions of UN

The Global Education Coalition (GEC) is a global platform for **multistakeholder coperation** to drive education transformation to achieve Sutainable Development Goal 4.The GEC mobilized support at all levels to mitigate the divide in education caused by COVID-19. They collaborate in order to make the transformation of education across the globe happen, especially, for instance, during the pandemic where they supported the continuation of learning in such emergencies.

The Global Digital Compact (GDC) is a global framework for digital cooperation and governance of digital technologies and artificial intelligencd proposed by the UN. GDC aims to build a safe and inclusive environment while including equitable digital devices for all. Resulting, mechanisms to close the digital divide and support digital ooperation and capacity building globally are included in this initiative.

The UN General Assembly adopted in March 2024 a resolution on AI. This resolution aims to cose the digital divide between rich developed countries and poorer developing countries and make sure they are all at the table in discussions on AI. For the GA it was important that AI is used as a tool for the training of the future worker generations. Most importantly is the safe use of artificial intelligence.

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Points to consider

Affordable WiFi expansion

It addresses the core barrier of connectivity by prioritizing public-private investments in broadband infrastructure for schools, rural areas, and underserved communities, ensuring low-cost or free access points like community hotspots and school networks. By reducing data costs and improving reliability, it enables consistent access to online learning platforms, directly boosting attendance and engagement for millions of disconnected students.

digital literacy curricula

This means to integrate essential skills. Such as safe internet use, critical evaluation of online content, and basic coding, into national education systems from primary levels, with teacher training to deliver them effectively. These programs go beyond access to emphasize pedagogical integration, including multilingual resources and accommodations for disabilities, to prevent a "second-level" divide where connected students lack meaningful competencies. Prioritizing this ensures learners develop future-ready skills for employment and civic participation, closing gaps exacerbated during remote learning shifts.

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Blended financing for devices

This means to combine public funds, development bank loans, philanthropic grants, and corporate contributions to subsidize affordable laptops, tablets, and solar chargers for low-income students and schools, scaling up programs like device leasing or refurbishment initiatives. This approach mitigates high upfront costs that exclude vulnerable learners, with mechanisms like education technology funds ensuring equitable distribution and maintenance. By making hardware accessible without straining national budgets, it supports sustained digital learning and narrows the gap to educational inequality.

Main organisations

International Telecommunication Untion is a specialized agency of the UN responsible for issues related to information and communication technologies (ICT). The ITU supports countries that are less developed in expanding internet connectivity And find effective infrastructure strategies

The Center for Digital Inclusion in Brazil creates centers in low-income, rural, indigenous communities, hospitals, prison, and psychiatric clinics and provides them with access to information and communication technologies.

The World Literacy Foundation works in low-resource communities to provide devices and learning resources.

UNESCO leads digital learning and inclusion initiative. They include capacity-building for the use of digital devices programs for both teachers and students

The Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative is an international organisation providing deman/driven assistance to developing countries seeking to harness the potential of ICT to improve their education systems.

GEC aims to advance digital education to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4.

UNICEF fights for the right of an equal Digital education through focusing on digital skills and safe online environments for children.

Plus, private companies often collaborate with these following foundations and NGOs to provide the services and materials such as the digital devices, the connectivity and the training.

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Dictionary

OECD
stands for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. It is an international body where mostly developed democracies collaborate to create policies for economic growth, prosperity, and sustainable development.

Literacy
Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and understand language, but it has evolved to include digital skills.

UNESCO
stands for United NAtions Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizatio. They are a specialized UN agency that promotes global peace and sustainable development.

Multi-stakeholder cooperation
This cooperation involves diverse groups working together to solve complex problems.

Developing countries
These are nations with lower living standards, underdeveloped industrial bases and lower Human Development Index scores.

Divide
A divide is a separation of something. In this context, the separation of the population regarding the digital access, meaning the inequalities.

The Sustainable Development Goals
17 Goals are her included and were set by the UN in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, ad ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030.

UNICEF
This is the UN agency dedicated to protecting the rights and well-being of children worldwide.

NGO
A Non-Governmental Organisation is a non profit group formed by citizens to address social, political, or environmental issues, providing services and advocating changes.

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Most involved countries

India is the country with the largest offline population, 886,7 million. Despite the many initiatives taken by the country, its internet access stays vers uneven. Over half of the government schools still lack internet access. These devices are a burden for many students across India.

South Africa has worked to include ICTs within the education system and aims to connect schools by 2030. Barriers to educational technology adoption and implementation aare still present. There's a huge lack of resources and internet infrastructure and a huge divide within the students of the population.

In Brazil, only 41% of rural households have internet access compared to 89% in urban areas. About 20% of the population can't afford either internet or the needed digital devices. This difference leads to inequality among the students. Plus educators often lack sufficient training to actually integrate technology into their teaching.

Japan emphayises national digital platforms and digital learning policies. In 2019, one of Japan's most significant efforts has been launched which is its Global and Innovation Gateway for All School Program that aims to equip all students in compulsory education with digital devices

France's national Digital Strategy for Education was adopted by the Ministry of National Education and Zouth in January 2023, whose strategy aims to strengthen students' digital skills and accelerate the integration of digital tools in the teaching/learning process. Inclusivity is included.

Germany's Digital Strategy 2025 includes digital education as a main priority, aiming to integrate digital skills and tools in the education system. DigitalPakt Schule was launched and aims to strengthen digital infrastructure in schools. Funding all the equipment is included and supported by 6.5 billion euros. 630 million euros support a national digital education platform.

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HELPFUL SOURCES

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